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Working Paper on reduction of the risk of war through accident, miscalculation, or failure of communication

THE PROBLEM

The technology and techniques of modern warfare are such that much reliance is inevitably placed on the ability to respond rapidly and effectively to hostile military action. Events which may occur in connexion with the efforts of one state to maintain its readiness to respond to such action may, in varying degrees and with varying consequences, be misconstrued by another. The initiating state may have underestimated the ambiguity of such events and may have miscalculated the response they would call forth. The observing state may misinterpret them and feel compelled to act.

Non-belligerent steps of a precautionary character taken by one state may be viewed by another as being provocative at best and, at worst, as presaging or constituting the initiation of hostilities. Accidents can occur and may be considered deliberate acts. Unauthorized acts may appear to reveal hostile purpose, and fault may be incorrectly assigned.

Particularly where such actions and events may occur against the background of an already existing crisis in the relations of the states concerned, erroneous assessments may dictate a rapid and disproportionate response. As a consequence, sudden and unexplained changes in the military situation may increase the risk of the outbreak of war.

The United States has been keenly aware of this problem and has taken positive measures to reduce the risk of the outbreak of war insofar as its own armaments and armed forces are concerned. On a continuing basis, the United States seeks to accomplish such objectives as the following:

1. To incorporate special safety features into the design of weapons in order to preclude an accidental nuclear explosion.
2. To develop types of weapons systems and to design techniques for their employment calculated to increase the feasibility of deferring a military response until confirmatory evidence has been received and evaluated.

3. To exercise effective command and control over the choice of military response and to maintain procedures and arrangements for limiting any possibility of unauthorized use of weapons.

The United States regards its approach to these matters as a useful contribution to reduction of the risk of the outbreak of war. However, the United States recognizes ~~that there are limits to the effectiveness of measures which any state may undertake alone.~~ In any case, the problem, which exists in respect of non-nuclear as well as nuclear armaments, is of concern to many states. It will continue to exist as long as armaments and armed forces, whether nuclear or conventional, remain at the disposal of states separated by immediate differences of historical grievance.

These considerations offer compelling reasons for seeking to curtail the arms race and to achieve disarmament in a peaceful world. They also call attention to the need for reaching agreement on the early implementation of limited measures designed to reduce the risk of the outbreak of war through accident, miscalculation, or failure of communication.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

The "Outline of Basic Provisions of a Treaty on General and Complete Disarmament in a Peaceful World", presented by the United States to the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament, April 18 1962, proposes measures concerning advance notification of major military movements and manoeuvres, conduct of confirmatory and supplementary observations, improvement of means of continuing consultation on military matters and of communication in time of military emergencies, and establishment of arrangements for examination of possible additional steps. The common purpose of such measures is to reduce the risk of the outbreak of war through accident, miscalculation, or failure of communication. Depending on their exact character, these measures could lessen the hazard that sudden changes in the military situation might inadvertently be misconstrued as representing the mounting of an attack.

In the context of a disarmament programme, these measures would contribute importantly to the building of confidence and also to prevention of possible disruption of the disarmament process. They can also be placed in operation prior to the implementation of a disarmament programme and might help bring about conditions under which such a programme might more readily be achieved.

There may, of course, be differences in the character of measures suitable in the context of a disarmament programme and the character of those which might be acceptable in advance of such a programme; that is to say, certain measures might be undertaken on a more extensive scale during disarmament than prior to its initiation. However, although most of the measures must be regarded as experimental in character and too much should not be asked of those measures which may be considered appropriate for early implementation, they can effect useful and significant advances in the capabilities of states to provide mutual reassurance.

The measures proposed by the United States can be undertaken either as a group, in which case each would serve to reinforce the effectiveness of the others, or specific measures can be undertaken separately. A beginning can be made with as much or as little as may be agreed at any particular time, and as experience is gained through co-operative implementation of early agreements, the initial measures can be modified or expanded, and new measures can be added.

Taken as a whole or considered separately, the measures suggested by the United States can have wide applicability to the relations of a number of states or groups of states in different geographic areas. Some measures can be undertaken directly between the states concerned; depending on the circumstances, others might be more effective if undertaken by groups of states. It follows that details of procedures and arrangements to implement the measures can best be developed in specific cases by the states or groups of states involved in order to ensure that the measures will be designed to meet their special needs.

In outlining the general character of these measures in the sections below, the United States hopes not only that the measures will commend themselves to states represented in the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament but also that other states will recognize their desirability. For its own part, the United States is prepared to work out the details of these measures with other states which may be interested, including the Soviet Union, and where particular measures might be most effective if undertaken by groups of states, the United States is prepared to consult with other members of the groups in which it participates, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and to join them in working out mutually agreeable arrangements.

ADVANCE NOTIFICATION

Purpose. Advance notification of major military movements and manoeuvres could provide additional opportunity for calm appraisal of military activities which might give rise to misinterpretation as threatening the imminent outbreak of hostilities. The ultimate character of such an appraisal would, of course, depend on many considerations in addition to the fact that advance notification had been provided. However, the establishment and use of procedures for advance notification could assist in reducing any hazard that detection of an unannounced activity of seemingly major proportions might induce a rapid and disproportionate military response.

A certain amount of information is currently made available by a number of states. In some instances, such information is necessary to ensure the safety of non-military activities being pursued in the vicinity. Moreover, for its own part, the United States frequently provides advance notification specifically in order to preclude any possibility of misinterpretation. As a general matter, however, the current practices of states vary widely as to content, timing, and procedure, and there arises the question of whether such practices can be expanded, regularized, and more fully utilized. The suggestions of the United States in this regard are outlined below.

Content and timing. Criteria for determining what military activities might be of concern are, in many respects, subjective and dependent on the general situation in which a particular activity may occur, the states or geographic areas involved, and the level of tension at the time. Accordingly, it may be difficult to specify precisely all activities respecting which advance notification might be most useful on a continuing basis, and in a number of instances substantial reliance may of necessity have to be placed on the judgement of the state initiating an activity.

However, if advance notification procedures are to be effective, the states or groups of states concerned would wish to know with reasonable certainty what information could be expected on a continuing basis, and, of equal importance, what types of activities would not be regularly reported. The following types of activities might usefully be explored from the standpoint of their inclusion in advance notification procedures:

1. Movements and manoeuvres by ground forces of considerable strength where such activities may be conducted in the proximity of frontiers.

2. Significant movements and manoeuvres of naval surface forces of substantial size.

3. Co-ordinated flights of sizable numbers of military aircraft where such flights may deviate from routine or well-known patterns or where they may take place in the vicinity of frontiers.

4. Launchings of long-range ballistic missiles where an unusual number of such launchings may be scheduled to occur within a limited period of time.

The foregoing list, which could be more clearly defined in an agreed manner, is intended to suggest the principal types of activities which might be of some concern and in respect of which it might be feasible to establish routine advance notification procedures. However, states should be free to provide advance notification in any additional instances deemed by them to warrant use of such procedures as might be established.

Although the exact amount of detail provided might vary, such matters as the following could reasonably be expected to be covered: the type of activity; the approximate size of the units involved; the beginning and terminal dates of the activity or the period during which it was scheduled to occur; and the locations, areas, or direction of movement involved.

Such information should be provided on a timely basis. As a general matter, notice might be provided as schedules become reasonably firm, with, say, seven days' notice being given where practical in the case of major activities. Notice of changes in initial schedules should be reported as promptly as possible.

Procedures. To ensure authenticity, and to avoid the lack of precision which might result from voice transmission of information, notification could appropriately be made in the form of an official written communication issued by the state or group of states initiating the activity. Such procedures as the following might be considered:

1. Under a bilateral arrangement, a state initiating an activity could provide advance notification directly to the other state concerned. Specific channels could be designated for this purpose in order to ensure that notifications would promptly reach those officials having an interest in them.

2. Where groups of states were concerned, similar procedures could be designed. A question would arise as to whether notice would be given by the military headquarters of one group to that of the other, which would then re-transmit the information to its member states, or whether procedures should be such that both the military headquarters of a group of states and the military headquarters of member states would receive the information simultaneously.

3. A "clearinghouse", established jointly by the states or groups of states entering into a particular arrangement, might receive and disseminate information made available by participants. Since timeliness would be a key consideration, the most direct procedures would seem best suited for the purposes of advance notification. However, the concept of a "clearinghouse" might be examined as a possible supplement to, rather than a replacement for, direct procedures.

OBSERVATION POSTS

Purpose. Advance notification constitutes a potentially useful measure undertaken separately or in conjunction with other measures. A closely related measure would, in effect, represent an extension of the advance notification concept through the establishment of systems of ground observation posts at major transportation centers. The posts comprising such systems could receive such information relative to military activities in their vicinity as the host state might wish to provide and could, under agreed arrangements, observe the flow of military traffic and the general level of military activity on a local basis, thereby clarifying reports made pursuant to advance notification procedures.

Not only the capability of supplementing advance notification through direct observation but also the willingness of host states to co-operate in the establishment and operation of observation post systems could contribute further to the building of confidence and the improvement of reassurance in the relations of the states or groups of states concerned.

Elements of systems. It would be impractical (as well as unnecessary from the standpoint of providing general reassurance) to attempt to establish observation posts at all transportation centers. It would be sufficient to place posts at such locations as certain principal ports, major railroad junctions, intersections of key highways, and possibly at certain significant airfields.

The complement of posts might vary as the result of differing conditions in the locations of interest, but relatively limited complements should be adequate. Members of post complements would enjoy such privileges and immunities and would have such travel rights as might be agreed.

Each post would be responsible for observing military movements within an agreed surrounding area. Over-all value of the posts would be enhanced if, on the occasion of military movements through nearby areas, host states would, at their discretion, afford opportunities for observation at the point nearest the post-city. Similarly, it might be useful to be able to conduct occasional visits to transportation centers where no posts were permanently located. In all cases, access would be limited to points appropriate for observation purposes.

To facilitate accomplishment of the missions of observation posts, host states should provide advance notification of movements passing through the post area.

Extent of geographic coverage. The potential usefulness of systems of observation posts is not confined to particular states or areas. In the broadest sense, such systems would be useful wherever significant military activities take place. The geographic coverage of particular systems, however, would, as a practical matter, be designed to reflect military relationship in a realistic manner.

Where neighbouring states might undertake to provide mutual reassurance through establishment of a system of observation posts, it is not unlikely that transportation centers near frontiers would offer suitable locations. Where groups of states might wish to undertake such a measure, appreciation of military realities would seem to make desirable the establishment of posts in each of the participating states since observation of areas from which forces might be projected would be of importance in addition to observation of more central locations.

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATION ARRANGEMENTS

Purpose. The establishment of systems of ground observation posts in fixed locations would represent a major improvement in existing conditions. However, it is apparent that the capabilities of such posts would be limited. Accordingly, it would seem useful to consider whether mutually acceptable arrangements for additional types of observation could be developed either to supplement systems of ground observation posts or as separate measures. As a general matter such arrangements could be useful either on an ad hoc or continuing basis and could provide highly effective and flexible means of rapidly identifying and clarifying military activities and events.

Elements of systems. Any and all of such observation techniques as the following offer substantial promise:

1. Aerial observation.
2. Mobile ground observation teams.
3. Over-lapping radars.

Each of these techniques offers a different approach to resolving the same problem: that of lessening the possibility of unexpected confrontations of military power and thereby lessening the risk of the outbreak of war. The details of arrangements for employing such techniques would be on an agreed basis and of a character designed to give equal assurance to all participating states.

Extent of geographic coverage. Where states or groups of states wished to employ techniques such as the foregoing, agreement would have to be reached on the geographic areas involved. Such areas might be identical for all techniques although this need not necessarily be the case. The problem can be approached on a pragmatic basis with due regard to the relationships of the states or groups of states concerned.

EXCHANGE OF MILITARY MISSIONS

Purpose. The problem of reducing the risk of the outbreak of war does not, of course, arise simply from the unexpected character of certain military activities or lack of factual knowledge concerning them. In the first place, the state initiating an activity may have miscalculated the response that might be occasioned on the part of another state. In the second place, a state which

views a particular activity with concern may be misinterpreting its true character. In both cases, each of the states involved will proceed not only on the basis of such factual information as may be available but also in the light of its own past experience, its assessment of over-all military relationships, and its military as well as political evaluation of the intentions of the other state.

Even with adequate factual information, there is no way of ensuring that these broader factors which govern calculations and interpretations will prove accurate guides in a specific situation. However, it appears reasonable to suppose that such factors may be more clearly accurate, or less so, to the extent that they are formed on the basis of extensive or narrow contacts between the states or groups of states involved. In this regard, it may be of some significance that direct contacts between the military establishments of many states and groups of states, are, generally speaking, relatively narrow. The exchange of military missions suggests itself as a possible approach to this aspect of the problem.

General character of exchanges. The exchange of military missions is conceived as taking place between the central military headquarters of states or groups of states. Each mission would be headed by an officer of high rank. A number of additional officers, possibly of specialized competence, and the necessary supporting personnel would complete the mission. Members of the mission would be fully accredited and would enjoy such privileges and immunities and would have such travel rights as might be agreed.

Within the framework of the agreed arrangements, the mission would carry out formal and continuing liaison with the military headquarters of the host state or group. Functions of the mission might include such activities as the following:

1. Receipt of such information or views on military matters as the host state or group might wish to make available.
2. Observation of such specific military activities or events as the host state or group, at its discretion or under agreed arrangements, might make accessible.
3. Consultation on military matters of common concern.

4. Participation, upon request, in efforts to clarify ambiguous situations where lack of authentic information might prove disquieting either to the host or the sponsoring state or group.

5. Reporting of the foregoing to the sponsoring state or group and representation of its views on military matters in contacts with the host headquarters.

Although the foregoing functions are of considerable importance, it would be hoped that in practice the opportunity for continuing contact between competent and responsible military officials would itself prove to be of substantial value to those involved and to the states or groups they would represent.

COMMUNICATIONS ON MILITARY EMERGENCIES

Purpose. Although extensive technical means of communication are available today, there is a question as to whether existing arrangements for communications between states would prove sufficiently rapid and reliable in time of a military emergency or crisis. If there is to be assurance that means of communication will be available when needed, steps must be taken in advance, and it would appear to be a reasonable precaution to place in effect between particular states special arrangements which could ensure the availability of prompt, dependable, and direct communications. Awareness of the availability of such communications links could itself prove reassuring, and should the need to use them arise, they could be employed with a minimum of the uncertainty that is characteristic of periods of tension.

Principal elements. In considering the establishment of special communications links, it would be necessary for the states concerned to reach agreement on a number of matters.

1. In view of the essentially experimental and untested character of such arrangements, it would not appear necessary or desirable to attempt to specify in advance all types of situations in which a special communications link might be utilized. However, there should be a common understanding of the general purpose of the link and of the broad circumstances under which it might be most useful. In the view of the United States, such a link should, as a general matter, be reserved for emergency use; that is to say, for example,

that it might be reserved for communications concerning a sudden change in the military situation or the emergence of a military crisis which might appear directly to threaten the security of either of the states involved and where such developments were taking place at a rate which appeared to preclude the use of normal consultative procedures. Effectiveness of the link should not be degraded through use for other matters.

2. Specific technical means should be determined in the light of the geographic locations and types of equipment available to the states concerned. The primary criteria would be that technical arrangements be effective on a continuing basis and that they be as rapid as practical. Ordinary voice telephone represents one possibility, and radio might also be considered although until communications satellites become available on an operational basis, radio might not prove sufficiently reliable. In both these cases, however, there would seem to be some possibility of inadvertent error either through lack of precision in reception or through incorrect translation. Considering all aspects of the problem, the use of teletype systems might, on balance, prove preferable. It should be noted that a line reserved for transmission of messages by teletype could have a dual capability and be used for voice communication as well should that prove desirable.

3. Each state would be responsible for arrangements within its own territory, would determine the terminal (or originating) point of the link, insofar as its end of the circuit was concerned, and would make such arrangements as might be needed to effect internal distribution of messages to appropriate government officials. In the case of the United States, it might be practical for the link to originate (or terminate) in the national command center, which maintains continuing contact with principal government officials, including the President. Such a location would also permit relevant data and experience in military matters to be brought rapidly to bear. The route for connecting the two end points of a particular link would, of course, have to be agreed.

4. Adequate arrangements would be made by each state for continuous manning of the link and for acting on messages which might be received. Periodic joint tests or checks of the link could be undertaken.

3. Identification of specific technical risks and clarification of supposed risks.

4. Development of proposals for additional agreed measures and encouragement of separate efforts by the states concerned where such efforts might offer a more practical approach.

The foregoing functions are not offered as specific terms of reference but are rather intended to be illustrative of broad areas which might be of interest to a commission such as that suggested by the United States. Progress in working out the technical details of the other measures outlined in preceding sections may assist in determining when it might be useful to establish a special commission of this character. For its own part, the United States would be prepared in this case, as in the case of other measures, to participate fully, and the United States would find reassurance in the willingness of other states also to participate.
